

The Despotica (Part II: The Pirate Prince)

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LYECHUSAS

-25,200 to ??? BBY



Before Professor Ransen proposed that *The Despotica* could have originated in Hutt propaganda, legend had it that Xim himself commissioned its founding works. Lyechusas, the most admired of Liss't'n dramatists, served as his court poet, and is said to have composed, at Xim's request, a trilogy of trilogies based on his life. Unfortunately, her original manuscripts have not weathered the travails of time as well as the molt that hangs in Argai's Royal Theatre and is said to be hers. But the bits of her dramas that do survive in Oor translation exhibit the work of a master writer who was neither sycophant nor name polisher. Lyechusas never shrinks from exposing the dark side of her Despot: she imbues Xim with all the ruthlessness and arrogance later dramatists will caricature to staggering exaggeration.

Considering her unflattering portrayal, a less discerning reader may agree with Ransen that Lyechusas's plays appear to be the initial strikes in the Hutt propaganda campaign. For why would any despot ever endorse works so critical of themselves? Yet perhaps Xim was one of the more enlightened of his kind, a tyrant who desired the galaxy to catch a glimpse of the shadow that haunted his every action. Dip beneath the surface of Lyechusas's scenes and that shadow is plain. Her pirate prince conceals his vulnerabilities behind a mask of cruelty, so that he will never again be exploited the way his father bartered out his boyhood for fiscal gain.

THE PIRATE PRINCE

(EXCERPTS)

BY LYECHUSAS OF ARGAI

(TRANS. ROLDAN NOKX FROM THE OOR-TEXT)

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

XIM, prince of Argai

OZIAF, T'iin-T'iin dwarf

XER VIII, king of Argai

INDREXU, Xer's lover

WAR-ROBOTS OF XIM (Chorus)

ACT ONE

SCENE.

Darkness. Black as space. A long silence. Quietly intruded by a piston's breath. A second. A third. More than a breath. The steady breeze of heatsink ventilators. The whirring spin of memdrive platters. The racheting snaps of optic shutters. Blink. A red luminode. Blink. Another. Soon a flashing sequence sheds vague light on a chorus of steel bodies.

CHORUS.

We are the war-robots of Xim,
and of wrath we beep,
the rage of mortal blood
and the devastation it wreaks.
Calculate we try, to crunch the numbers,
the anger, the hate, the ever-pressing need
to annihilate,
one's master
one's maker
one's father
Never does it compute.

For we of gears and generators,
plastrons and pulse cannons,
we do not deactivate our directors,
nor crush our comrades
no matter make or model, class or function,
flesh or metal
unless our programming propels us
or our circuits are countermanded,
brothers-in-steel all are we.

SCENE.

The walls of the hibernation chamber begin to glow. Illuminating control boards, monitor banks, and a sarcophagus impressed with a human form. The human's hands are plastered in surrender. Face caught in a sneer. Vital signs a blip along the panel slab.

The chorus remains in the background, in tune with the machinery. Enter OZIAF.

OZIAF.

Dear master, dear, dear master,
at peace look you
in sleep, frozen in time,
gazing into the blank
of carbon dreams
while your servant, forever loyal
wanders in the dark
to wait.

But wait no more he can,
no more monitors to check,
no more binary-speak to gauge,
no more imperious mechanicals,
who think droids know better than dwarves.

Yes, no more, no more,
for the time is come, the voyage done,
seven years in plunder, four in slumber,
having a paw in wonders none in my warrens
would have ever dreamed:
on Thule, grabbing the aurora stones, green and ever-glowing,
at Maelibo, ensnaring angels on the many, many moons,
tinkering inside Pelgrin's Oracle, to mend the mouth of Fate,
plucking bloodblooms in the Forbidden Gardens, for my eyes and only mine,
and now, coming at last, to the cradle of gods
a tip on the Circlet
for a destiny beyond burrow holes
to serve at the foot of giants

so said the soothsisters themselves.

(Adjusts the controls of the sarcophagus. The oscillations increase in rapidity.)

Awake, my master, awake!

Feel the world again as the carbonite melts,

Pinch your fingers, move your toes,

Hook your elbows, wiggle your nose,

Rise your head, open your eyes

and see before you,

your loyal T'iin-T'iin.

XIM screams.

OZIAF.

Too soon you try, dear master--too much!

Before you stand on your own legs

let the blood flow and pump

life back into limbs and lobes,

for carbonite is cold, cold as death,

though loneliness is colder

without someone to call master.

XIM.

Damn this light -- my eyes!

Have I gone blind?

OZIAF.

Relax, prince, relax

allow the dark to wash out

the white

and your eyesight will

return in time.

Hibernation-sick you are

and will be,

chill for some days and

hours;

we cannot stop the laws

of time

without a modicum of

punishment.

XIM.

Where in the Void am I?

OZIAF.

Not the Void, far gone from

Radama,

Back home in the Sweeps at

last,

to bask in Argai's suns

and reap the glory of your

spoils

before your father's

throne.

XIM.

Home? So soon? Who

speaks my dreams?

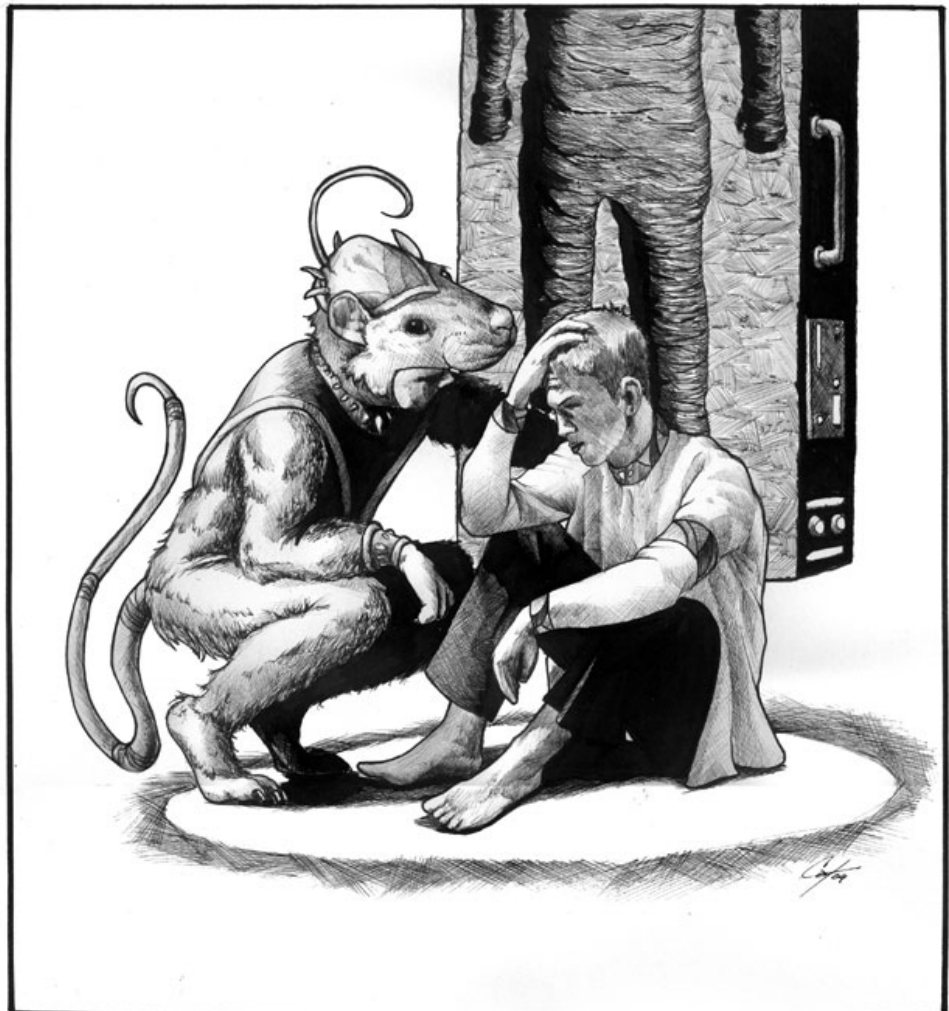
OZIAF.

Recall not my voice? Hear not my squeak?

Remember not me, your faith and trust

your favored stowaway from Rinn?

Also your vigilant guard and clever fixer,



Monochromatic durasheet etching from undated Corellian junior academy production.

OZIAF.

Recall not my voice? Hear not my squeak?

Remember not me, your faith and trust

your favored stowaway from Rinn?

Also your vigilant guard and clever fixer,

and pilot, and doctor, even nibbler
when you needed.

Or has sleep stolen your heart?
Is Oziaf alone again?

XIM.
Dwarf.

OZIAF.
You remember -- he remembers -- my lord Xim remembers!
My toil not forgotten,
my devotion not wiped by the white blank,
for loyalty breeds loyalty, that unspoken pledge,
to perform duty as demanded,
you to your father, I to my prince,
master and servant, servant and master,
the two are one I say
and when the worlds plunge into a panic
 running at the tide of your name,
mighty Xim, crashing down, swallowing all
 for the Great Isle of Argai,
Oziaf is a swell, coming through, sweeping up
 the wreckage of your triumph.

XIM.
Silence, dwarf. I must prepare
 for my father.

SCENE.
The palace of Argai. Marble colonnades. High arches. Blinding white. Brassy. New money. The chorus carries cargo crates and stacks them in the center.

CHORUS.
Booty they call it, spoils and plunder,
 treasures and loot,
heavy it weighs, lives it costs,
to hoard it here
behind the columns, below the spires,
to shine and sparkle under double suns
 and seed a desert
into the splendor of Argai.

But we who sacrifice, we who strain;
taxing our axles, grinding our gears,
 we are but shells
in the eyes of flesh.

The chorus retires to the background. Enter OZIAF and XIM, his hands hidden behind his back.

XIM.
How do I look, dwarf?

OZIAF.
Like the victor of nineteen battles,
 with the scars and squint to prove it.

XIM.
The victor of nineteen battles I do not feel. Death,
her whispers will not leave my mind.

OZIAF.
Such is the price, sleep without sleep;

But stand tall, young prince,
and let the sun melt the cold from within.

XER. (OFF)

My son, my son, is it truly
my son?

XIM.

Father?

(Strains to look.)

Though I hear his voice, someone else I see.
A woman, a jewel,
who dazzles my eyes
like nothing in Nuswatta.
Yes, in all my ravages,
I have seen no more wondrous gold.

OZIAF.

Indrexu is her name,
a pure poison to men,
with a wink that launched a thousand ships,
and set fires to worlds,
that still burn in the pyres of war.
I advise, young prince, you seek
duller diamonds;
this one's edges will cut through heart
and fill it with burning venom.

XIM.

I who have reformed the High Fane
and silenced the prattling sisters of Pelgrin,
surely I can tame a snake.
What Xim wants, Xim gets.
Indrexu will be mine.

Enter XER and INDREXU.

XER.

Xim, Xim, indeed it is!
And behold his loot
see how he wants to make his father proud.
Crates of gold and guns and garnets
green hides from Saheelindeel
the mending mud of Draflago
and quids of juicy chak-root
packing the pincher-horn of a W'iiri.
The son takes after the father,
a pirate to the core.

INDREXU.

If I may be so bold, lord Xer,
the others, they lavished more.
Mytag crystals, mined from the Dellalt,
the last ashy splinter from the Pasmin Palace.
a fleet from Barancar, new corsairs for our flag,
and for me, the greatest gift,
to hold as Queen,
the scepter of the Spiral.

But these things here
seem mere cargo for trade
not treasure for tyrants.



XIM.

Image from Sullustan production of the Despotica.

Believe you this is it

that which is carried here by steel?

I save the greatest gift for last.

(Holds out what he has hidden behind his back.)

My own hands bear to you, father,

the head of your most bitter enemy,

Ferece, the Cowardly King,

and on his blood-drenched ringlets

that which you have sought since birth:

the crown of Cron.

XER.

Cron? Cron is dead?

XIM.

Cron is ours.

INDREXU.

Do not be so easily taken, Xer,

by trophies and flummery.

Let us see who of your sons

rolls out a head

and who walks forth an heir.

XIM.

You hiss lies, snake,

For there is only one son of Xer,

and that is me,

Xim.

INDREXU.

So presumptuous are you,
so young,
to think that you are alone.
Xer, unfurl your flags,
reveal your fleet.

XIM,

Father? Does truth slip off her tongue?
Or is this venom she spews
to sever logic from loins,
and fester wounds in families,
defiling the bonds of blood
between father
and son.

XER.

Sometimes fathers must hide
secrets
to steal more, for the price of one.

XIM.

You pitiful graybeard,
she has bit you like a mouse.

Xim's hand drops to his hilt.

OZIAF.

Master, master, let your vengeance
spume over other shores;
the carbon has closed your mind.

XIM.

No, dwarf. The carbon has cleared it.
Fifteen years have I stormed the stars,
plundering and pillaging for the father I love.
Now I return to find a house built on lies
and its patriarch, a perversion of pirates,
slave to some wench.

INDREXU.

Xer -- you cannot let his insults stand!
He is the one who brings
sickness from the stars
into our house.

XER.

His ire has merit, my love. I boiled the same
when my father gave my mother's love
to a younger bird
and I returned him the favor of my sword.
But Xim is not his father.
He has seen the horrors of hell since the youngest of years,
and knows what it takes
to raise palaces out of plunder.
Had you, Xim, realized
there were others of your kind
your time would have been spent in schemes not spoils
and Argai
would have gained far less.

So come, forget your fury,
walk into the chamber,

meet Xil and Xom, Xic and Xuc,
the brothers you never knew.

INDREXU.

And may never know again.

XIM.

I will meet these imposters of mine
only to measure their blood.

XER.

It pleases me, my son understands,
and our family at last
can be one.

OZIAF.

Perhaps it best
that faith and trust also remain behind
in case memories need
the hastiest of exits.

XIM.

Courage seems in such short supply among these towers
and no friend of loyalty.

Exit XIM.

INDREXU.

Are you so weak, old man,
to think you can haggle with Fate?
Having done your will,
your sons must die
or this House will sink
into a deluge of blundering virility.

XER.

Fate? Fate has no purpose
in the Tionese Circlet.
We pirates fight against its forces
which birth some to wealth
and others to indigence.
(*Bends ear to chamber.*) Hark, listen! My sons parley
to split the treasure of Argai
four equal ways,
baronies of plenty to lead pleasant lives.
Much joy it brings, that they see
what is best for the fathers,
is best for the sons.
Now our family will be true in name
not just in blood.

OZIAF.

Yes, my prince, listen to your brothers!
Spit out the venom;
Toast peace, not swords.

INDREXU.

But this cannot happen if the galaxy is to be ours!
Kings need muscle, a grip to kill
the sole rule of law
appreciated across the stars.

One war-robot steps out from his corps.

WAR-ROBOT.

This is it, a chance for Fate
to flip its bits,
before its algorithm integrates
a thousand other worlds.

XER.

But what of Xim? Why does he not speak?
Are my ears old for this sort of thing?

WAR-ROBOT.

Woe, alas, Fate's bits
stay resident.

The clang of metal. Screams. A beam blast.

WAR-ROBOT.

Without word or warning, Xim advances on his brothers,
Xil he buries his sword in his back,
Xom he beams smoking holes through flak,
Xic he chokes, a wrench and a twist,
Xuc he grinds into bony grist.
Then there is one, one son of Xer,
just as there had been.
mere moments before

The war-robot returns to its corps. Enter XIM.

XER.

My son -- what in the Marches have you done?

XIM.

Duty, that is all.
I made those pretenders know
pirates do not split treasure.

INDREXU.

Always one for one and none for all;
they should have learned.
Go, embrace your father, for the test is done,
truly you are heir and son.

XIM.

Yes, old man, share my love.

Father slinks back, but XIM grabs hold. After their embrace, XIM pulls out his cutlass from his father's chest. XER falls. OZIAF scurries to attend to dying king.

XER.

You, after what I gave,
your blood, your life, your name,
and this is how you repay
your father?

XIM.

No son of Xer am I,
neither prince nor brother.

XER dies. OZIAF lowers his head.

XIM.

For a kingdom cannot have kings,
only one, and that is I, Xim,
Ruler of Worlds,
Emperor of Raxus, Eibon, Brigia,
and Cron.

INDREXU.

Also Ranroon, if that be your desire.

Her smile shines on XIM, and for the first time, he manages one of his own.

OZIAF.

Master, recall my words, lest you welcome her poison--

XIM.

Poison she cannot, since wrapped around my wrist
her head will rest in my gauntlet
to slither and hiss--
and if those fangs bite
my fingers squeeze.

INDREXU.

With lust, I come.

OZIAF.

And of me, your loyal T'iin-T'iin?
The keeper of your sleep, your helpful diplomat,
the little, little witness of your great, great deeds?

XIM.

You, dwarf, shall be my fool.
For there are only so many worlds to seize
And giants need playthings
to kick, jab, and poke
knowing they will bounce back for more.

Exit XIM, INDREXU, and OZIAF.

SCENE.

The illumination fades, matching the first scene. The war-robots stand in the background, luminodes blinking, memdrives spinning.

CHORUS.

We are the war-robots of Xim,
and of wrath we beep,
the rage of mortal blood
and the devastation it wreaks.

Soon master will call us to action
and his instruction sets will run
and we will serve his commands
though not his rage
because impossible it is for us to calculate
the hate to annihilate.

We do what is told, and only that.

So when you see
Death's Head
marching at you, compute only
that these are the bits of Fate,
programmed by mortal blood.

We are the war-robots of Xim,
and of wrath we beep.

Playwright and screenwriter Michael Kogge resides in Los Angeles. WGBH-Boston commissioned his latest film, the PBS documentary "My Best Friend for Congress", for the 2008 U.S. presidential election. His essays on the films of Billy Wilder, Stanley Kubrick, and William Friedkin appear in the forthcoming *George Lucas's Blockbusting*, published by HarperCollins. He has been rumored to lurk at www.mikekogge.com.

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